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LETTER DATED 26 JULY 1999 FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

In my letter to you of 14 July 1999 regarding the East Timor popular consultation process (S/1999/786), I informed you of my decision to begin the registration on 16 July 1999, on the condition that meaningful, visible improvements in the security situation would be observed in the immediate future.

I am pleased to report that the 200 registration centres throughout East Timor have now been open for the first 10 days of registration, with only occasional temporary closures owing to local security problems. In that 10-day period, 239,893 East Timorese have registered, 233,716 of them in East Timor itself, and the remainder at external registration centres.

Security conditions in a number of provinces have shown signs of improving. This positive development is in part attributable to the greater cooperation now being shown by the Indonesian authorities, in particular the police, with their counterparts in the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET).

Overall, however, security conditions still remain inadequate. Ongoing intimidation by armed militia groups remains particularly prevalent in the western districts of East Timor. One serious consequence of this situation is the continuing inability of tens of thousands of internally displaced persons to return to their homes in safety. The areas from which the largest numbers have been displaced, particularly Covalima, Bobonaro and Liquica, remain under the tight control of the militia. UNAMET, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the local authorities are cooperating to promote the ability of the displaced to return to their domiciles and ensure their enfranchisement, but further action to bring armed groups under control is essential.

The people of East Timor are showing laudable determination to participate in the popular consultation despite continuing intimidation. I therefore intend to continue registration on the understanding that the Indonesian authorities will work with UNAMET to achieve the further necessary improvements in the security situation and urgently address the problem of internal displacement. The completion of registration and the continuation of the popular consultation process will depend upon my being satisfied that these improvements are achieved

and sustained. As I am sure the Security Council realizes, conditions required for a largely technical exercise such as registration are notably less stringent than those which will be necessary for campaigning in the run-up to the consultation.

I have informed the Governments of Indonesia and Portugal of my decision. My Special Representative will continue to keep me apprised of the situation in East Timor and I will keep the Security Council fully informed of developments.

(Signed) Kofi A. ANNAN